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SUBJECT: ADVOCATES AND SKEPTICS SHARE THEIR VIEWS ON THE  
NATIONAL AGENDA

REF: A. AMMAN 7498

[B](#). AMMAN 6898

[C](#). AMMAN 5849

[D](#). AMMAN 5065

Classified By: CDA DAVID HALE FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: As the Jordanian political class awaits the release of the reform recommendations of the Royal Commission for the National Agenda (NA), Jordanian officials and political observers shared their views on the prospects for reform with visiting NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Dibble during her late September visit to Amman. DPM Marwan Muasher highlighted a reformed electoral law, a new political parties law, and tax reform as the three issues to tackle early on in the comprehensive national plan for the next decade. Planning for the rollout of the thousand-page NA report later in October is underway, including a shorter, more digestible summary of the text. Some leading political analysts expressed skepticism that real political reform could overcome the power of entrenched political elites. COMMENT: For all the intense work put into the National Agenda over the past seven months, the GOJ's heavy lifting has yet to begin. END COMMENT AND SUMMARY.

DPM Muasher: Upbeat NA Facilitator  
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[1](#)2. (C) Deputy Prime Minister Marwan Muasher, the chairman of the Royal Commission for the National Agenda, described for Dibble on September 25 the work of the Commission's eight committees comprised of over 200 leaders and experts - overwhelmingly from outside government - who met over the past seven months to hammer out a blueprint for reform-driven political, economic and social development in Jordan (Refs A, B). Pulling from his desk a 5-inch thick document, Muasher flipped through the full text of the National Agenda to show how each of the sections included performance indicators for which ministries would be held responsible. He noted that the NA language was flexible enough to accommodate changing conditions while being applied to each task. The Agenda would call for actions from government, the private sector, and partnerships of the two.

[1](#)3. (C) Boosting the rule of law in Jordan is a central element of the NA, Muasher noted. For example, the NA criticizes the manner by which Jordan adapted to global economic competition (and acceded to the WTO) by adopting over 220 provisional laws and amendments to laws while parliament was out of session. COMMENT: We have heard this criticism aired privately by retired ministers concerned about constitutionality, but never in public and not in a document to be proposed for adoption by the government. END COMMENT. This and other similar sections of the NA may not be very welcome to some in the GOJ, Muasher opined, but they reflected the transparent process by which the National Agenda had been crafted.

[1](#)4. (C) Muasher said the three most prominent pieces of the NA were the elections law, a political parties law, and tax reform. Of these three, he focused on legislation regarding elections and parties as critical next steps in the very near future without which the rest of the NA could not move forward. NOTE: In a separate conversation, U.K. Ambassador Christopher Prentice repeated for Dibble this same scenario, based on his briefing with Muasher, an indication this is a consistent GOJ message. END NOTE. For Muasher, tax reform - devising an equitable system that consistently collects revenues - is an issue to be picked up in 2006, after the first two hurdles have been overcome.

[1](#)5. (C) Muasher lamented the difficulties he has faced in getting the word out to the public on the National Agenda. Once he has a final version, Muasher predicted he would be in a better position to market it. Muasher took pride in the shorter and more readable version of the document his staff was producing, which would help make the case for the NA with graphics, charts and slides.

[1](#)6. (C) Muasher thought it likely the chief opposition to the Commission's recommendations would come from two camps: first, from within "the political establishment of this

country" - a reference to elements who would see themselves losing power under political and media reforms and, second, "from the skeptics", chiefly in the media, who do not believe a government commission is capable of producing recommendations for serious reform. Muasher believed at least the second camp would be won over after the release of the report.

#### Hatough-Boran: Buy-In and Consensus Key

17. (C) Acting Foreign Minister and Minister of Tourism Hatough-Boran told DAS Dibble the National Agenda represented nothing less than the future of Jordan. Reflecting the Cabinet's general knowledge of the NA process (vice Muasher's intimate, day-by-day handling of the NA), she said that consideration was now being given on how to present the National Agenda to the public. Boran surmised that it was critical to have something akin to a "public debate," and that more players had to be involved in laying the groundwork for it. Each of the 200 experts who participated in drafting the National Agenda now have to go back to their constituencies and sell the reform message. Because this represented the ideas, the concepts, and the future of Jordan, GOJ officials have to do it right and play it right, she said. Boran noted that the Jordanian habit of heavily criticizing any initiative would be an obstacle to consensus. Journalists' attitudes so far were mixed.

18. (C) Boran said the GOJ planned to involve embassies of donor nations in the rollout - the National Agenda in each of its sections is keyed to foreign assistance requests for specific amounts - and that Prime Minister Badran would give the NA a needed push. Responding to DAS Dibble's comment, she concluded that Jordan was definitely committed to remaining a leader of reform in the region.

19. (C) Central Bank of Jordan Deputy Governor Mohammad Shahin noted to Dibble that the National Agenda had an important economic component, including the portion he was interested in - finance and banking. He said that Jordan wanted to be a "financial hub," but that the many prerequisites were "tremendous" in terms of legal and other regulatory commitments. The National Agenda spelled these out, he added.

#### Dinner With the Skeptics

10. (C) At a dinner hosted by Charge September 26 with four leading academic and media political analysts, Dibble heard views typical of the second, "skeptical camp" identified by Muasher above. Political columnist Oreib Rintawi, supported by two of the other Jordanian guests, noted that government-driven initiatives for reform -- the "Jordan Charter" campaign of the early 1990's, and the "Jordan First" campaign in the late nineties -- had been tried before. Rintawi was included in these efforts, and worked just as hard as the NA royal commission recently had. But according to Rintawi, the earlier reform commissions' recommendations "had gone nowhere" and he expected the same of the NA. American-educated Yarmouk University political scientist Muhammad Mo'many pushed back, pointing out that the palace had taken on, and been bruised by, Jordan's entrenched political interests this spring in the stand-off over PM Badran's cabinet (Refs C, D). Mo'mani called on commentators to wait until the plan's rollout before condemning it.

11. (C) COMMENT: While DPM Muasher appeared tired as he explained how much had gone into building the NA, he seemed relieved that he could now move into the next phase of introducing a finished product to the public. This phase, too, may exact a price - this time political - from those who are tasked with selling the National Agenda to a wary public, especially entrenched East Bank elites still uncertain of the King's vision that to some degree has only peeled away the comfortable cocoon of paternalistic government to which they have become accustomed.

12. (U) DAS Dibble did not have the opportunity to clear this message.

HALE